

Spring 2025

PSC 369: Social Movements and U.S. Politics

Instructor: Dr. Richard Fording
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Class time: Monday/Wednesday 3:00-4:15pm
Classroom: TH 107
Office Hours: Flexible – after class and by app't (Zoom)

I. Course Summary:

In this course we will examine the causes and consequences of social movements in U.S. politics. Although social scientists have defined “social movements” in somewhat different ways, we will rely on a relatively simple definition that reflects the shared elements of all of the definitions found in the literature. Social movements are collective, organized efforts of non-state actors to promote or resist change, that rely in whole or in part on unconventional political tactics. Throughout U.S. history, it is difficult to identify major examples of policy change that were not spurred by social movement activity. Indeed, the wave of protests that swept the country in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis police officers attest to the fact that social movements continue to play an important role in our politics today. Yet, social movements remain the least studied form of political influence within the discipline of political science. Therefore, much of the material from this course will draw from the fields of political sociology and history, where the majority of the research on social movements can be found. Although we will examine a broad range of social movements to illustrate the concepts and theories introduced in this class, due to the centrality of race in American politics, we will spend a considerable amount of time studying the various movements for racial justice and the counter-movements that they spawned over the last 50 years.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Differentiate between social movements and other forms of collective action.
- Compare and contrast the major theories of social movement formation.
- Understand the full range of strategies and tactics used by social movements.
- Compare and contrast the major theories of social movement outcomes, including theories of social movement decline, diffusion, counter-movements, and state response.
- Apply the theories and concepts studied in this course to real examples of social movements in U.S. politics.

II. Required Textbooks

1. Paul Almeida. *Social Movements: The Structure of Collective Mobilization*. University of California Press.
2. Doug McAdam. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 2nd Edition. University of Chicago Press.
3. Suzanne Staggenborg, *Social Movements*. 3rd Edition, Oxford University Press. 2021. **NOTE: There is an earlier edition of this book on the used book market (2nd edition). You should NOT purchase the older version because it is significantly different. The 3rd edition has unique chapters and material that you will not get with earlier editions.**

III. Course Requirements

Reading

In addition to the required texts, the reading for this course consists of academic journal articles, excerpts from important books, and the speeches and writings of social movement leaders. For some weeks, the amount of reading is substantial. Consequently, it is imperative that you set aside an appropriate amount of time to carefully read (and in some cases re-read) the material. For the weeks where the assigned reading is somewhat heavier than usual, I will give you some guidance as to which sections should be read carefully, and which sections might be skimmed. Nevertheless, my expectation is that you take this course seriously and invest the necessary time to read all of the material.

Exams: 55% of your final grade

There will be two exams – a midterm exam (**25% of final grade**) and a final exam (**30% of final grade**). The exams will be in-class exams and consist of short answer and multiple-choice questions.

Research Report: 20% of your final grade

You will be required to write a research report (at least 2000 words) on a social movement organization that is or was aligned with a U.S. social movement. The final due date for the report is April 18th (by midnight).

Class Participation: 15% of your final grade

Your class participation will be assessed based on two types of activities.

- On randomly selected days I will administer an in-class reading quiz as a way to monitor your attendance and your preparation for class. The quizzes will be brief (1-2 questions) and they will be based on the assigned reading for that day. The quiz must be taken on Blackboard, and you must take the quiz during class. Please note that if you take the quiz outside of class, this will be treated as a case of academic dishonesty, and I will report this to the Dean's Office for further action. I will drop your three lowest quiz grades when computing your quiz grade at the end of the semester. Note that the minimum score that you will receive if you take the quiz will be 50%. If you are not in class to take the quiz you will receive a score of 0. These quizzes will comprise 10% of your final grade.
- I will regularly initiate and invite class discussion and will keep track of your active, constructive participation in these discussions. (5% of final grade).

Protest and Popular Culture: 10% of your final grade

You are required to identify and analyze a “protest song” that is relevant to a specific social movement. There are many lists of protest songs available on the internet, including this list of the “[100 Greatest Protest Songs](#)”. The assignment will consist of three components:

- (a) Identify the song and songwriter/performer (please provide the lyrics in an appendix).
- (b) Identify the specific social movement that the song is intended to promote.
- (c) In approximately 2 pages of double-spaced text, analyze the meaning of the song and how and why it is relevant to the social movement. How does the song attempt to instill “political consciousness” among its listeners, and thus attempt to promote participation in the movement?

This assignment is due NO LATER THAN April 4th (by midnight). Students will briefly share their songs and a brief summary of their analysis during the final week of class. Please turn in the assignment through Blackboard.

Social Movements in the News: Up to 5% extra credit toward your final grade

You are invited to contribute to the class by participating in a feature of the course that I call “social movements in the news.” I will be making weekly posts to a class blog in which I will apply concepts and theories studied in this course to events happening around the world in real time. You are invited to participate by responding to my posts and the comments made by other students. You will receive 1 point of extra credit for each post that is at least 150 words in length.

Grading:

Participation	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	30%
Research Report	20%
Protest Song Analysis	10%

Calculation of Grade:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	<59
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66		
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62		

IV. Course Policies

Textbook Access. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain access to the required textbooks for this class prior to the time that these materials are assigned in the syllabus. Not having access to the text is not an acceptable excuse for failing to participate in class or the failure to complete an assignment on time.

Classroom Decorum. The Code of Student Conduct requires that students behave in a manner that is conducive to a teaching/learning environment. Students who engage in behavior that is disruptive or obstructive to the teaching/learning environment will be subject to disciplinary sanctions outlined by the Code of Student Conduct. Disruptive/obstructive behavior certainly includes the following: physical abuse, verbal abuse, threats, stalking, intimidation harassment, hazing, possession of controlled substances, and possession of alcoholic beverages. For the purposes of this class, such behaviors will also include talking to another student when course material is being presented in class, the use of cell phones in any way, the use of laptop computers (or any other electronic device) for anything other than taking notes for this class, and reading the newspaper or any other periodical or book that is not assigned for this class.

Excused Absences and Late/Missed Work. Students will be excused from late assignments and will be allowed to make up missed exams when (1) the student has promptly notified the instructor of the missed work, and (2) the student has an acceptable excuse. An acceptable excuse is defined as any event or circumstance that prevents the student from attending class or completing an assignment and which is beyond the reasonable control of the student. Examples of such events include major illnesses, serious illness or death of an immediate family member, travel required for officially recognized University organizations, and other reasons as determined by the instructor on a case by case basis. Without exception, documentation must be provided to the instructor for an excuse to be deemed acceptable.

Academic Misconduct. All students in attendance at the University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academically related matter and any knowing or intentional help or attempt to help, or conspiracy to help, another student.

The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

Use of Plagiarism Detection Software. The University of Alabama is committed to helping students to uphold the ethical standards of academic integrity in all areas of study. Students agree that their enrollment in this course allows the instructor the right to use electronic devices to help prevent plagiarism. All course materials are subject to submission to Turnitin.com and will be included as source documents in Turnitin.com's restricted access database for the purpose of detecting textual similarities. Turnitin.com will be used as a tool to help students avoid plagiarism in written documents.

AI use is not allowed. All submitted work must be produced by the students themselves, whether individually or collaboratively. Use of a generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete an assignment constitutes academic misconduct.

Disability Statement. If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit 133-B Martha Parham Hall East to register for services. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services, 133-B Martha Parham Hall East, before receiving academic adjustments.

Severe Weather Protocol. Students should go to the main University of Alabama website, www.ua.edu, for general information in case of an emergency. Following an emergency/disaster, the instructor will communicate any emergency information concerning the course within Blackboard.

Civility Statement. The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence, or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

Statement on SB129 and So-called Divisive Concepts. All University faculty, instructors and teaching staff have the academic freedom to explore, discuss, and provide instruction on a wide range of topics in an academic setting. This class may present difficult, objectionable, or controversial topics for consideration, but will do so through an objective, scholarly lens designed to encourage critical thinking. Though students may be asked to share their personal views in the academic setting, no student will ever be required to assent or agree with any concept considered "divisive" under Alabama law, nor penalized for refusing to support or endorse such a concept. All students are strongly encouraged to think independently and analytically about all material presented in class and may express their views in a time, place, and manner, consistent with class organization and structure, and in accordance with the University's commitment to free and open thought, inquiry, and expressions.

(Course schedule begins on next page)

V. Course Schedule (version 1/08/2025)

The course schedule is subject to change, especially for the later weeks of the course. I will always post an announcement to the class if I revise the course schedule in any way.

CLASS DATES	TOPIC	READING / COURSE MATERIAL
Jan 8	Introduction to Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the syllabus Review SB 129
Jan 13	What are Social Movements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almeida – Chapter 1 Staggenborg – Chapter 1
Jan 15 Jan 20 (MLK Day) Jan 22	Theories of Social Movement Formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological explanations Resource Mobilization Theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McAdam – Chapters 1-2 Staggenborg – Chapter 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through the section titled <i>Resource Mobilization Theory</i>
Jan 27 Jan 29	Theories of Social Movement Formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Political Process Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McAdam – Chapter 3 Almeida – Chapter 3 Staggenborg – Chapter 2 (remainder of chapter)
Feb 3 Feb 5	Social Movement Emergence: When and Where Do Movements Start? Who participates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almeida – Chapter 4, 6 Staggenborg - Chapter 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>-Movement Emergence: Mobilization and Recruitment</i> <i>-Influences on Mobilization</i> <i>-Individual Recruitment and Participation</i>
Feb 10 Feb 12	Case Study: The Emergence of the Civil Rights Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McAdam – Chapter 5
Feb 17 Feb 19	Social Movement Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing Media and Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almeida – Chapter 5 Staggenborg (Chapter 3, <i>Movements and Media</i>)
Feb 24	Midterm Exam	
Feb 26	Social Movement Tactics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Disobedience Nonviolent Resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government,” 1849. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” 1963.
Mar 3 Mar 5	Case Study of Protest Tactics and Diffusion: The Civil Rights Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> McAdam – Chapters 6-7 <i>Eyes on the Prize</i> (TBA)
Mar 10/12	SPRNG BREAK!!!!	
Mar 17 Mar 19	Social Movement Outcomes: Theories of Government Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almeida – Chapter 7 Staggenborg, Chapter 3 (<i>Movement Outcomes</i>)
Mar 24 Mar 26	Social Movement Outcomes: Spinoff Effects and The Protest Cycle of the 1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staggenborg – Chapter 4
Mar 31 Apr 2	Case Study: The Women’s Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staggenborg – Chapter 5
Apr 4	PROTEST SONG ANALYSIS DUE (by midnight)	
Apr 7 Apr 9	Case Studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LGBT Movement The Environmental Movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staggenborg – Chapters 6-7

Apr 14 Apr 16	Social Movement Outcomes: American Right-Wing Movements as Counter-movements	• Staggenborg – Chapter 8
Apr 18	Research Report Due (by midnight)	
Apr 21 Apr 23	Protest Song Analysis – Student Presentations	
May 1 (Thursday) 1:30-3:30pm	Final Exam	